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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 002838

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NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JENDAYI FRAZER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/19/2012

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: MDC-ANC CONTACTS ON ZIMBABWE

REF: HARARE 2829

Classified By: political section chief Matt Harrington. Reasons: 1.5 (B) and (D).

Summary

1. (C) According to a senior MDC parliamentarian, the ANC has agreed to a ZANU-PF plan for Zimbabwean Speaker of Parliament Emmerson Mnangagwa to replace Robert Mugabe, while offering token representation to the opposition. MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai was briefed on this initiative, which likely prompted his December 18 statement condemning South Africa and Britain. The retired Rhodesian Colonel named in the statement admitted being sent as an emissary to Tsvangirai by Mnangagwa and defense forces chief Vitalis

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Zvinavashe, a particularly interesting development if Mugabe was unaware of this overture. Meanwhile, Father Fidelis Mukonori's efforts to broker a Mugabe-Tsvangirai dialogue are at an embryonic stage, but both sides appear willing to engage in such an effort given the provision of unspecified guarantees from the other. The MDC no longer believes South Africa will play a fair broker role on Zimbabwe and has told Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon in a letter that Pretoria has "repudiated its membership in the Troika" by its demonstrated partiality toward the "illegitimate Mugabe regime." End Summary.

ANC-ZANU-PF plan on the way forward

2. (C) Reftel reported issuance of a statement by Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) leader Morgan Tsvangirai accusing Britain, South Africa, and elements of ZANU-PF of conspiring to keep the ruling party in power after Robert Mugabe's departure from office. We subsequently received a report of two recent meetings held in South Africa between MDC parliamentarian (and shadow justice minister) David Coltart and Patrick Moseki, described to us as a senior ANC official, which might shed additional light on the motivations for Tsvangirai's statement.

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3. (C) According to Coltart's report, Coltart and Moseki first met in South Africa on December 8. Moseki reportedly explained that Thabo Mbeki was facing growing criticism from within the ANC and its coalition partners for not doing enough to make the South African economy more equitable. He implied that Mbeki was consumed predominantly with consolidating his political position, and that his views on Zimbabwe should be considered in that light. Coltart replied with a description of the dramatic economic decline and the famine in Zimbabwe, and made it clear that the resulting tensions could soon erupt if the underlying political crisis were not soon resolved. He reiterated the MDC's proposal on a way forward -- Mugabe's retirement followed by establishment of a transitional authority which would restore some degree of political and economic stability and pave the way for a new, internationally-supervised presidential election. Coltart acknowledged that a transitional authority would have to grant some sort of amnesty to Mugabe and his senior officials, and that the international community would have to be prepared to offer safe passage. Moseki replied that Zimbabwean Speaker of Parliament (and long Mugabe's heir apparent) Emmerson Mnangagwa was in South Africa attempting to sell the ANC a leadership succession plan which excluded the MDC. Moseki said he would meet Mnangagwa the following day and report back to Coltart.

4. (C) On December 9, Moseki and Coltart met again. Moseki said he had been part of an ANC delegation which had met for most of that day with Mnangagwa. The Zimbabwean Speaker had laid out ZANU-PF's plan of action, which Moseki implied the ANC had bought into:

--Mugabe would serve out his term, which expires in 2008 but would soon appoint Mnangagwa Prime Minister and gradually turn over most executive functions to him;

--Mnangagwa would offer a token number of Cabinet positions to the MDC (he suggested two seats but was urged by some of his ANC interlocutors to increase that number to five);

--If the MDC opted not to go along with this plan, it would be crushed ruthlessly;

--ZANU-PF would implement the plan regardless of what the international community thought of it or Mnangagwa.

15. (C) Comment: We know that Morgan Tsvangirai has been briefed on the above discussions, which could have prompted him to issue his December 19 statement accusing South Africa of collaborating with ZANU-PF to ensure the latter's continued hold on power. The warm reception accorded Mnangagwa at the ANC congress could have been another factor in Tsvangirai's decision to issue such a strong condemnation of the South Africans. The MDC leadership has come to the conclusion, over the past several months, that the South African government will not play a fair broker role on Zimbabwe. Tsvangirai has written to Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon stating that the MDC would

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find it "extremely difficult" to continue to participate in a Commonwealth Troika process which involves South Africa. In the letter, a copy of which has been faxed to AF/S, Tsvangirai writes: "We are convinced that through its

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duplicity, South Africa has repudiated its membership in the Troika. Pretoria has totally distanced itself from any attempt to evaluate the Zimbabwe crisis impartially and objectively. It can only meaningfully participate in the Troika deliberations not as an honest broker, but as an open and self-confessed representative of the illegitimate Mugabe regime."

Father Fidelis keeps at it

16. (C) Meanwhile, Father Fidelis Mukonori is continuing his efforts to arrange a Mugabe-Tsvangirai dialogue. In a meeting with Tsvangirai advisor Gandhi Mudzingwa on December 19, Father Fidelis said Mugabe had told him that the MDC leader had as much of a right as any Zimbabwean to govern Zimbabwe. Mugabe, however, expressed concerns about the MDC's pending court challenge of the presidential election results and about some in the MDC who were more interested in seeking retribution than moving forward. Mudzingwa told us it was apparent from his conversation with Father Fidelis that Mugabe wants certain guarantees, most likely immunity from prosecution for past misdeeds. Asked whether Mugabe would trust Tsvangirai was capable of delivering such a guarantee, Mudzingwa told us that was an issue to be worked out in an inter-party dialogue. In his conversation with Mudzingwa, Father Fidelis was apparently dismissive of Emmerson Mnangagwa, calling him a "small boy." Father Fidelis was due to follow up with Tsvangirai in a meeting scheduled for December 19. (Comment: This initiative is clearly in its embryonic stages and it is unclear whether it will lead anywhere. Mudzingwa was pleasantly surprised by Mugabe's reported comment regarding Tsvangirai, and said dropping the court case was not out of the question provided significant concessions were agreed first by the other side. Father Fidelis told us separately that no meeting would occur this year and until the election court case was resolved. End Comment.)

British in cahoots with Mnangagwa?

17. (C) Tsvangirai told the Ambassador on December 17 that he had learned of efforts by the British Government to convince the editor of the independent "Daily News" to soften its regular criticism of Emmerson Mnangagwa. He said he also knew that retired Colonel Lionel Dyck -- who was head of the Rhodesian military's parachute regiment and now runs an international demining company -- was working with Mnangagwa and General Vitalis Zvinavashe, Chairman of the Defense Forces, to find a solution to Zimbabwe's political crisis. (Comment: Tsvangirai clearly assumed these two developments were related, and appears to have concluded that the British government believed Mnangagwa's replacement of Mugabe was the best way of restoring political stability to Zimbabwe and that they were working together to effect that outcome. End Comment.) In response to a journalist's question, Dyck acknowledged meeting with Tsvangirai as an emissary of Mnangagwa and Zvinavashe. "I would like to see peaceful change in Zimbabwe," he said, "and, as such, the vehicle of ZANU-PF should be used as part of a transition to peaceful change."

Comment

18. (C) As we concluded in reftel, Tsvangirai was concerned about being squeezed into accepting a political settlement in which he and the MDC were given only token representation in an Mnangagwa-led government. He apparently concluded that exposing his suspicions publicly was the best way of warding off such a possibility. It is not yet clear whether the MDC leader's vehement condemnations of particular governments and individuals burned bridges with some of those -- both internally and externally -- most willing to and capable of helping extricate Zimbabwe from its cycle of crises. In addition, if Mugabe was not aware of their overture to Tsvangirai via Colonel Dyck, Messrs. Mnangagwa and Zvinavashe

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will have some very deft explaining to do.

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